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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, the proportion of part-time faculty teaching in the nation's community colleges has increased dramatically, and perceptions of their role have also changed. Before 1970, the typical part-time instructor was a community expert, who was viewed as a valued institutional resource providing program specialization, enhancement, and flexibility to the benefit of the institution, its students, and its full-time faculty. By the late 1970's, 57% of all community college faculty were teaching part-time. The fastest growing segment of the new wave of adjunct faculty was "would-be" full-timers, rather than specialists, who taught core courses rather than specialized courses. They came to be seen as a source of cheap labor, rather than a valuable resource, in that the institution was not required to provide fringe benefits, extensive support services, or long-range financial commitments. There are negative implications in the heavy reliance on part-time faculty for full- and part-time instructors, students, and the colleges. Full-time faculty have to spend a greater proportion of their time on administrative, preparatory, and support activities. Institutions, though apparently getting value for money, are most often not getting equal output from part-timers. Students are unlikely to get the same quality of instruction from teachers only tenuously linked to the institution. Finally, the value of part-timers and all professional teachers is demeaned. (HB)

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"Who's Mr. Staff: Cheap Labor or Valued Resource?"

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(Lincoln, NE, April 7-9, 1983)

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By now, every community college must have its own version of the "Who's Mr. Staff?" story. The actual dialogue can vary:

Example 1. "Hi, Betty! What are you taking next quarter?"

"Just Biology and Speech."

"Who are your instructors?"

"Granger for Biology, and Staff for Speech."

Example 2. "I want to drop a course."

"OK. You'll need your teacher's signature. Who is it?"

"I'm not sure. The last name is `Staff,' I think."

Example 3. "Pardon me. I'm trying to find my teacher's office."

"Who is your teacher?"

"Tom Staff. He should be here; I noticed in the registration schedule that he teaches an awful lot of courses."

Specific versions, of course, vary, but there seem to be four key elements in the stories: a confused student; the elusive but hard-working Mr./Ms. Staff; the full-time instructor who hears, remembers, and repeats the story; and an institution which uses so many part-time faculty that they have become a blur of cheap labor instead of a valued resource.

Since the early 1970's we have witnessed a growing trend towards the use of part-time faculty, particularly in community colleges. By 1979, AACJC statistical compilations showed that 57%

of all community college faculty were part-time. Articles debating the pros and cons of adjunct instruction have appeared in educational journals with increasing regularity.

But while the trend toward part-time instruction has been dutifully documented and discussed in educational journals, this dialogue has not appeared in popular periodicals. The general public remains largely ignorant of the extent to which college core courses are staffed by part-timers, and is equally unaware of the possible implications of the trend for students, the teaching profession, and society as a whole. When will someone place the issue before the American public?

Before 1970, the question of "Who's Mr. Staff?" probably could have been answered, "a valued resource," if not by naming individual faculty. Most adjunct instructors were community experts--academic or practical specialists who brought to their occasional teaching experiences a skill, talent, or content expertise in some way unusual or unavailable from within the ranks of the college's full-time professional employees. Usually these adjuncts were hired to provide program specialization, enhancement, and flexibility. The financial benefits of using part-time faculty were not overlooked by administrators, but economy was only one of several significant factors influencing the use of part-timers. Others included flexibility, availability expertise, community relations, and the freedom to try out programs or people without making binding commitments to them (Hammons, 1981). Some of these same reasons apply to the

use of some adjunct faculty today, and do not necessarily imply that part-timers are perceived as cheap labor.

When adjuncts are valued as specialists, deliberately and carefully chosen by a college to perform a teaching task which is for them a chosen sideline or highlight in their lives, everyone berefits. Students can gain immeasurably from working under teachers who daily practice their skills in the marketplace. And students may find these contacts doubly valuable when they seek employment after graduation. When adjuncts are teaching professionals employed full-time at community high schools or at other colleges, they can provide a built-in link between educational levels, thereby contributing to educational continuity and articulation. Again, students can benefit from their instructor's familiarity with other area educational institutions. When adjuncts are retired teachers, who enrich the life of the college by choosing to continue teaching an occasional course in a much-loved special field, students can witness the merging of aging and wisdom, and learn much about the value of a lifelong commitment to a discipline.

Full-time faculty, as well as students, had good reason to view adjunct colleagues as valued resources when adjuncts were used primarily as specialists. Adjuncts supplemented programs and filled in for full-time staff at odd hours and at distant places. Because of the presence of adjuncts, full-time faculty were likely to have fewer preparations (excluding, for example, preparations of highly-specialized courses), and were more likely

to be able to teach "regular" schedules tailored to their liking. Yet as full-time faculty obtained the right to bargain collectively, few fledgling bargaining units defined themselves so as to include their valued part-time colleagues. A few were far-sighted enough, or defensive enough, to include in their master contracts a provision that, in the event of financial misfortune, part-time staff should be laid off first. Full-timers tended to view part-time faculty either as a hedge against retrenchment or along familiar university models--as teaching assistants, guest lecturers, or in some cases, professors emeriti--even though it should have been increasingly apparent that, in the 70's, the community college was beginning to define adjuncts in an entirely new way.

The 1970's were the decade of growth for community colleges. To keep pace with the increasing numbers and changing needs of the students who flocked to their open doors, community colleges relied more and more on part-time employees. Though some continued to wear the "specialist" label, the fastest growing segment of the new wave of adjunct faculty was would-be full-timers (Magarrell, 1978). Academically credentialed in traditional disciplines, the new adjuncts had expected to take their place in the professional ranks, but found themselves relegated to "would-be" status by an inflationary economic cycle which threatened the financial stability of community colleges. Using part-time faculty to teach core courses rather than specialized courses enabled community colleges to maintain economic flexiblity.

Savings could be realized not only because adjuncts are paid significantly less than full-timers, but because they don't require "extras": fringe benefits, extensive support services, and, most important, long-range financial commitments (Pollock and Breuder, 1981).

By the early 1980's, questions of institutional survival and educational quality met head-on as writer after writer considered the future of part-time instruction. Few argued with Hammons (1981) that "the question of whether or not to employ adjunct faculty is almost perfunctory; the reasons for their use are simply too compelling." But most sources agreed that, at some point, adjunct instruction becomes a liability rather than an asset. Tuckman (1981) cautioned, "From a national perspective, the major concern is that institutions will use the part-time labor pool as a source of cheap labor rather than as a means to upgrade their instructional program." Bramlett and Rodriguez (1982-83) warned, "If the community college exploits the part-timers as a source of cheap labor, their eventual disenchantment with the institution will undo whatever public relations campaigns any institution may attempt." Even Lewis Mayhew, who in Surviving the Eighties (1979) advised that perhaps one third to one half of FTE faculty could be part-time, also added that "care should be exercised that too much part-time instruction does not become the rule. There is need for a solid base of full-time faculty and well-established courses."

As many adjuncts themselves agree, part-time instruction is

often not fair to the students. The quality of adjuncts' classroom teaching is not usually at issue; several studies have shown no significant difference in the evaluation of part-time and full-time teachers (Cruise and others, 1980). But in ways which are not likely to appear on standard student evaluations, there is at least some question about the quality of instruction provided by adjunct instructors. Three national studies (in 1975, 1977, and 1978) reported by Cohen and Brawer (1982) found that in addition to several professional differences between full- and part-time faculty, part-time faculty required less reading; used fewer resources; required more quick-grade, in-class assignments; and met students less often outside the classroom than their full-time counterparts. Perhaps because of inadequate institutional support (such as an absence of offices), adjunct faculty may appear to be unavailable to students for counseling and to lack a firm undestanding of institutional policies and procedures (Bender and Breuder, 1973). And, though instruction in a particular course may be excellent, part-time faculty may view that course from an isolated perspective, and experience difficulty in relating the course to the total curriculum (McDougle, 1980).

Considering part-timers' pay scale, contractual specifications, lack of office space, and erratic orientation to college services and to the educational program and philosophy of the institution, it is understandable that such differences exist. But it is not good. If upwards of half of students' in-

struction at community colleges is to fall to part-time faculty, we must close the gaps in quality of instruction wherever they exist.

Some writers have suggested that, in some cases, part-time faculty are doing a better job of instruction than are full-time teachers. Bonham (1982) says, "some of the better teachers, with a firmer and fresher grasp of their field, may increasingly be seen among the part-time faculty of the land, and not those sitting tenured on the inside." This observation, if correct, might be explained by remembering that many of today's part-timers are would-be full-timers who should properly be full-time teaching professionals. But another explanation might be offered as to why full-time faculty sometimes appear less "fresh" than part-time standouts. Full-time faculty are finding that their time is increasingly consumed with picking up added responsibilities which, in better times, would have been shared with an influx of full-time colleagues. Student enrollments have increased, but without corresponding increases in full-time staff. Full-time faculty must advise and counsel their own students and those of the adjuncts; they must assume a larger share of non-teaching responsibilities at the college; and it is often they who must help to recruit, orient, train, and evaluate adjuncts. One of the most popular solutions to the problem of part-timer quality control is to have full-time faculty prepare syllabi to be used by all part-timers. One of the remedies for overcoming adjunct isolation is to pair adjuncts with full-time

sponsors. Another factored strategy is to arrange regular frequent meetings for full- and part-time staff to get together and share instructional concerns and techniques. Whether productive or not, valuable or not, satisfying or not, such activities are additional activities for full-time staff. They take time from instructional preparation, from research, and from scholarship. Full-time faculty are apt to resent such demands, and their performance may suffer as a result of overwork.

Gone are the days when adjuncts automatically took last choice of times and places to teach. Now, because of the difficulty of scheduling large numbers of often disgruntled part-time faculty, it is sometimes the full-timer who must take the sections adjuncts prefer not to teach. And with a superfluity of part-timers to serve as a hedge against retrenchment, full-time faculty may no longer view adjuncts as vital employment insurance. Were it not that so many part-time faculty are stimulating and valued colleagues, and that department reputations obviously rely on the performance of adjuncts as well as of full-time faculty, full-timers might well be more critical of part-time instructors than they are.

Even college administrators are starting to examine their proliferating part-time faculties with a more critical eye. Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne (1982) report that "few administrators are willing to state with any confidence that they are getting equal value by using part-time faculty. The assumption in many places is quite the opposite. Part-timers may be less expensive

in terms of direct costs, but the output attributable to their efforts, it is suspected, may be inferior to that of full-time faculty." Front-line administrators complain that they are given inadequate time to select, supervise, and evaluate part-time faculty. When full-time positions do become available, administrators may feel torn between their desire to reward adjuncts for years of faithful service and their desire to bring cultural or geographic diversity into their faculty.

Not insignificantly, a series of litigations centered around part-timers has made administrators weigh the stakes involved in hiring part-time help. Hammons (1981) states, "It is unfortunate that the threat of litigation was required to force colleges to give attention to questions of equity and fair play which should have been addressed years ago." Whether inspired by the threat of litigation or by a regeneration of academic conscience, the time has come to stop perceiving part-time faculty as cheap labor. Such a perception is both risky and unfair--risky, because faculty who are perceived as second-class may behave in kind; unfair, because adjuncts often possess all of the qualifications and credentials of their full-time counterparts, and deserve to be treated well (Torgovnick, 1982).

College administrators are attempting to improve their part-timers' lot by providing orientation programs, in-service programs, operational handbooks, full-time sponsors, and appreciation dinners. But it is possible that guilt, not genuine understanding of teaching, drives these attempts at development.

Landers (1979) writes, "When an instructor is paid only for his/her physical presence in the classroom, it defines an instructor in the worst way possible. It negates professional growth, class preparation . . . and defines them as worthless." Performance in the classroom is not synonomous with teaching as a profession. Profession also means spending time preparing for classes, being available to students in offices, giving students advice about their academic futures, serving on college committees, articulating with other professionals, doing research and presenting it, petitioning legislatures for education funding, and carrying on the traditions, stories, and philosophies of one's discipline and institution. For administrators to define "part-time instruction" as a flat-rate, hourly-wage, no-future classroom commodity is to demean the value not only of part-time faculty, but of all professional teachers.

In "Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education," the recent report of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, the issue of part-time teaching has finally been placed before the American public. The study panel, headed by Kenneth P. Mortimer, reports: "Strong involvement with students requires a primary commitment . . . In our minds, one full-time faculty member is a better investment than three part-timers, largely because the full-time faculty member contributes to the institutional environment in ways that go beyond teaching courses" (U.S. Government, 1984). While the panel acknowledges the value of

adjunct specialists, especially in certain fields, it suggests that even occasionally-employed practicing professionals should be encouraged to strengthen their ties with the institution and its students. The panel is blunt: "Part-time positions should be used to attract individuals with special talents and abilities and to provide flexibility in staffing special programs, not as a method for obtaining cheap labor" (U.S. Government, 1984).

Surely it would be a mistake to advocate a simple answer to the complex academic, financial and legal questions which constitute the issue of part-time instruction. Those of us who care deeply about the quality of life in the community of higher education must apply our knowledge and ingenuity to the issue as it affects our own institutions. We must recognize that a justifiable level of part-time instruction at one college may be inappropriate at another. We must acknowledge that to eliminate or denigrate part-time teaching would be as unwise as to perpetuate its use at the present levels. But full-time academic careers must again become available to our graduate schools' best and brightest prospects. Unless they are, today's students, and tomorrow's America, will pay the price.

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